

## What we're thankful for by LesbeanLatte

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Angst, Canon Compliant, Coda, F/M, Fluff, Gen, Multi, Thanksgiving, Thanksgiving Fic, also in my heart nancy was there for mike during his depression fight me on this, everyone is happy, just a little angst i promise, mostly happiness with some sad memories due to the past year, plot who, there's nothing saying it's not canon

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Max (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Eleven & Max (Stranger Things), Eleven & Nancy Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers & Steve Harrington & Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers & Will Byers, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Max/Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler & Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington & Dustin Henderson, Will Byers & Eleven & Dustin Henderson & Lucas Sinclair & Mike Wheeler

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**Summary:**

Thanksgiving break is coming up and everything is calm - for once. The heroes of Hawkins catch a break and settle into new and comfortable routines.

## 1. A new life

Nancy watched her little brother crunching through the autumn leaves, his tacky sweater pulled over his hands to keep them warm.

"Careful," she warned as he approached the almost invisible trip wire.

As he stepped over it carefully, she smiled a little remembering the first time she had driven him to Hopper's cabin in the woods and he had tripped, setting off a sound like a gunshot and bringing a panicked Hopper running outside.

That afternoon felt both like it had been a million years ago and only yesterday. In reality, it had only been a few weeks, but in those few weeks reality had shifted.

Really, the only difference in their day to day lives was that now Mike visited El every day after school.

Adjusting her fashionable coat and pursing her lips as Mike gestured for her to hurry up, Nancy thought about how much was different now.

Some days, the other boys would accompany them to the cabin, and most days Mike would end up having the others over to the Wheeler house to play dungeons and dragons after the two-hour time limit Hopper put on his evenings with El.

It was the day before the last day of school. Thanksgiving break was the carrot at the end of the stick for all of them, including Nancy, after a long semester. Joyce had (somehow) convinced Hopper to let El come over for a sleepover with all the kids on the last day of break, so none of them had felt the need to join Mike today.

Nancy wasn't sure how but she, Jonathan, and Steve had all somehow been roped into chaperoning the sleepover. Nancy wasn't sure when she had agreed to drive Mike out to the remote trail leading to Hopper and El's hideout every afternoon either. Not that she minded. Seeing Mike so happy after his depressive episode the last couple months during which she had been the only one in the Wheeler

household to notice or care about her brother's increasingly apathetic state was - nice to say the least.

Nancy followed Mike's lead in stepping over the trip wire with care. Mike was in a hurry to reach the door, almost running the remaining space between himself and the cabin. Every day he acted as if he hadn't seen El in years.

On the days when Will accompanied Mike - and Will accompanied Mike more than anyone else - Nancy would follow Jonathan back to the Byers home and they would sit in the drafty living room watching television or playing cards, or sometimes chatting with Joyce if she wasn't at work. On the days, like this one, when Jonathan worked, Nancy would go in with Mike and have coffee or hot chocolate with Hopper.

Mike banged on the door. No answer. Nancy gave him a look, and realization spread over Mike's face. The secret knock. He tapped out the pattern, and the door swung open, allowing the Wheeler siblings to walk inside.

"What a surprise," Hopper said, coming from the kitchen with a beer in one hand and a soda in the other. He handed the soda to Nancy.

"Thank you," she said with a smile. "Hi El," she added as El emerged from her room.

"Hi Nancy," El replied, peeking at Nancy shyly through her eyelashes.

El was wearing her usual overalls and flannel, and her brown curls were messy. Nancy had taught her how to apply makeup and do her hair but most days El didn't use what she had learned, which really didn't matter. El was pretty no matter what and beyond that, she was a sweetheart and Mike adored her.

Mike followed El to her room and El moved to close the door behind them until she was stopped by a look from Hopper.

Nancy felt an unexpected flare of jealousy seeing the exchange between Hopper and El, which she immediately hated herself for. El had spent the first half of her life being used by a psychotic creep for

sick experiments, and she was jealous of El's relationship with Hopper? How much of a selfish brat was she? She pressed her lips together, wondering how many times she would ask herself that question before it sunk in that she was privileged. Right. Privileged to have a dad who never knew where she was, never asked her about her day, never even looked her in the eye. She sure felt privileged.

Shaking away her self-pitying thoughts, Nancy followed Hopper into the kitchen and sat down across from him. To her surprise, he grabbed another beer from the fridge and cracked it open, handing it to her. She raised her eyebrows.

He shrugged. "I was in high school once," he said, taking a sip from his beer. "Just make sure to wait at least an hour after drinking that before you drive your brother home."

Nancy nodded, taking a sip. It wasn't great, but she understood it was more about the gesture than the actual drink.

Hopper leaned to the side to see inside El's doorway. El and Mike were sitting on the bed talking quietly.

"She's lucky to have you looking out for her," Nancy commented.

"Yeah," Hopper said, toying with a blue hairband on his wrist. "I hope so."

"She is," Nancy assured him. "I wish my dad cared so much." She felt her cheeks flush and immediately regretted the words.

"Hey," Hopper said, looking at her with eyes that seemed to bore into her soul. "I'm sure your dad cares."

"Yeah," Nancy said.

"I'm sure you and your parents are already looking into colleges," Hopper commented, a question in his voice.

Nancy hesitated. She had been meaning to bring up her thoughts about the future to Hopper anyway, and now seemed like as good a time as any. "Actually," she said. "After, well, you know what Jonathan and I did."

Hopper smiled, and Nancy detected a hint of pride in his eyes. "Exposed the bastards that killed your friend and helped the poor girl's parents find closure. You guys did a brave thing."

"Thank you," she said, smiling back. "Well, doing that, it felt I don't know, it felt right. Like I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. I was kind of considering looking into police academies after I finish high school."

"Really?" Hopper leaned back in his seat, thoughtful. "That's a great idea. I think you would be really good at it, Nancy. If you're willing to put in the work and risk your life to help others, any police force would be lucky to have you. You should do it."

Nancy hadn't realized she was holding her breath until she released it. "Really?" she asked.

"Absolutely."

"Do you think," Nancy had rehearsed asking this question a million times to herself in the mirror, to Mike, to Jonathan, to Steve, to Joyce Byers, but she hadn't anticipated asking it today. "Do you think I could maybe work with you sometimes on the weekends? I would be a volunteer, you wouldn't need to pay me or anything. It would just be so I could have some experience."

Hopper seemed taken aback, but to Nancy's relief, he was nodding. "Yeah," he said. "I think that's a good idea. I have to warn you though, most cases in Hawkins aren't nearly as interesting as what you've dealt with in the past."

"Maybe some mundane work wouldn't be so bad," Nancy commented.

"Amen to that," Hopper agreed.

They clanked their bottles together, and Nancy felt a warmth spreading through her despite the drafty air in the cabin and the cold beer.

## 2. A race

### Summary for the Chapter:

There's no way a skateboard could ever beat a bike. Unless, maybe, a certain fiery haired zoomer is the one navigating the skateboard.

"Lucas and Max, sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-"

"Go away, Erica," Lucas cut his little sister off, slamming the door on her and heading back to sit on the bed beside Max hoping she couldn't detect the embarrassment on his face. "I'm sorry about her-" he started but stopped when he realized Max was grinning.

"It's fine," she said, giggling. "Your little sister is adorable."

"That's one way to put it," Lucas muttered, glad Max wasn't embarrassed or upset about Erica's taunts.

"Hey," she said. "Wanna race again?"

"Yeah," Lucas said sarcastically. "Because after you cheated last time I totally want to race you again."

"C'mon," Max insisted. "El isn't here this time, so there's no way for me to cheat."

"And you realize there's no way for a skateboard to beat a bike, right?" Lucas asked.

"Only one way to find out," Max replied, already scrambling to her feet.

With a flash of fiery red hair waving behind her and a squealing laugh, Max was out of his bedroom and zooming down the hall much faster than her tiny legs should logically be able to go.

Lucas rushed after her, trying to ignore the hint of doubt trickling into his mind about his previous assessment that a skateboard could never be faster than a bike. Maybe, he thought, this would be true if

anyone other than Max was guiding the skateboard.

"Lucas!" Mrs. Sinclair said and Lucas skidded to a halt as Max disappeared out the front door, a wave of cold November air rushing into the house behind her.

Lucas watched in dismay as Max climbed onto her skateboard and began zooming down the street.

"Mom!" he complained. throwing his hands up.

"You know the rules," she said. "No running in the house!"

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Just don't let it happen again," she called as he speed-walked as fast as he could go without running.

As soon as he stepped outside into the autumn air he was sprinting towards his bike, on its kickstand near the front porch.

He climbed aboard and began pedaling with all his might.

After a few moments, he was just a few feet behind her, but still not able to keep up.

She glanced back at him, flashing a winning smirk. Lucas pedaled harder. The wind rushed in his face and his knees and lungs ached but he didn't slow down. He could beat Mike, Will, and Dustin in bike races almost every time. There was no way Max's skateboard could win, he was determined.

Somehow though, she raced past the telephone pole they always used as their marker at least ten feet ahead of him. Slamming on the breaks of his bike and stopped next to her, he stood up, allowing his bike to fall to the pavement beside him. Clutching his knees, he caught his breath. Max leaned casually against the telephone pole, smiling. She wasn't even panting.

"How do you do that?" he groaned.

"I'm a zoomer, remember?" she asked. "Now that I've won, fair and

square, I demand my prize."

"What? You did not win fair and square," Lucas said, throwing his arms up. "You started way ahead of me. Anyway, I don't remember agreeing on prizes."

"Hm," Max said, "I seem to remember being promised a kiss."

Lucas felt his face grow warm as Max leaned in and kissed him on the cheek.

"C'mon," she said, already with one foot on her skateboard. "Wanna go to the arcade?"

"I don't have any money," Lucas admitted. "I used all my lawn mowing money yesterday."

"That's okay," Max said, reaching into her jeans pocket and producing a handful of crumpled dollar bills and coins.

Lucas' eyes widened. "Where did you get all that money?"

"A certain asshole I'm unlucky enough to live with isn't so great at hiding his stash," she said, grinning.

"Alright!" Lucas said, trying to hide the breathlessness in his voice left over from pushing himself to the limit on his bike. "Let's go to the arcade."

"Sounds fun," Max agreed. "I'll race you!"

Before Lucas could argue, she was around the corner.



### 3. A driving lesson

#### Summary for the Chapter:

Steve had been depressed about being kicked out for approximately one day before he realized how amazing it was to have family dinners with Mrs. Henderson and Dustin and to have an adult (not to mention a weirdly knowledgeable middle schooler) who helped him research colleges at the library on his days off work.

Steve breathed a sigh of relief as the hands on the clock moved to seven o'clock and the last customer left the store.

Joyce Byers had been nice enough to help him get a job working with her at the shop, and he would never complain about it - especially not when the paycheck helped him pay his small amount of rent and afford food and gas and even savings which he would need for textbooks when he started school - but he was secretly looking forward to quitting at the end of December.

He was taking the semester off due to not really having any time to apply to colleges during his senior year.

After shelving a few items that customers had misplaced, sweeping, and locking up the store, Steve headed out into the cold November air and to his car.

When he got home he took in a deep breath and smiled as he walked in the door and the smell of chicken and vegetables wafted through the house.

"Dusty, hurry up and set the table would you," Mrs. Henderson's voice rang from the kitchen.

"Mom, can Steve take me to Mike's house after dinner?"

"Dusty, it's a school night."

"Mo-om pleeeeeease."

"Aren't you going over there for a sleepover tomorrow?" Steve asked, walking into the kitchen. "Start of Thanksgiving break and all?"

"Yeah but-"

Steve put a hand on his hip and gave Dustin a look and Dustin groaned.

"Fiiiiine," Dustin said, finishing up with setting the table before grabbing a plate and serving himself.

When they were all settled and eating, Mrs. Henderson started in on the same question she asked every day.

"So, Steve, have you decided on a school?"

"Well," Steve said. "I'm still looking. I want to apply at as many schools as possible to give me a better chance of getting in, especially starting halfway through the year and all. Nancy's been helping me tweak my personal essay and I think it's almost ready." Really, completely tear apart and re-write would have been a better word choice than 'tweak' but Steve didn't feel like explaining that.

Mrs. Henderson had offered to put him up after Steve's parents kicked him out when they realized he hadn't applied to - let alone gotten into - a single school. Steve had immediately searched Hawkins for places that were hiring. At first, he hadn't had much luck but then word reached Joyce Byers that he was looking and Steve wasn't sure how she managed it because the store owner didn't seem to be very happy about taking on a new employee but somehow she had gotten him a job there with decent pay and hours that were only semi-painful.

Steve had been depressed about being kicked out for approximately one day before he realized how amazing it was to have family dinners with Mrs. Henderson and Dustin and to have an adult (not to mention a weirdly knowledgeable middle schooler) who helped him research colleges at the library on his days off work.

After dinner, Dustin cleared the table and Steve washed dishes while Mrs. Henderson rinsed them.

"Mom," Dustin said. "Steve offered to take me driving."

"Hold on-" Steve said.

"Did he?" Mrs. Henderson turned to Steve with raised eyebrows.

"That's not exactly what hap-"

"Yes!" Dustin said. "So, what do you think?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Henderson considered, a soapy plate hanging absently in her hand.

"The conversation was actually more like this," Steve said. He did his best to imitate Dustin but it came out sounding more like Cyndi Lauper. "Hey Steve remember how you let Max drive your car?" he returned to his normal voice. "No Dustin because that never happened." He went back to his bad Dustin impression. "Do you think you could teach me to drive?" In his normal Steve voice again he said, "No probably not. Well, maybe. If your mom says yes. Because your mom is a super awesome lady and I'll respect whatever she says and so will you."

"I do not sound like that!" Dustin protested, setting down the plate he was supposed to be bringing to the sink. "Mom, I don't sound like that."

Mrs. Henderson sighed. "I'll tell you what," she said. "If you boys get this kitchen cleaned up in the next ten minutes, you can drive around the block a couple times before it gets too dark."

"Really?" Dustin asked, his eyes widening. Steve felt a surge of excitement himself, and he couldn't help but feel himself melt when he saw Dustin's huge grin.

So, they hurried to clean the kitchen. And maybe they spent a little more time excitedly talking about driving than actually doing dishes and maybe Dustin ended up spilling a cup of water and Steve ended up scolding him and making him clean it up - "No Dustin, actually clean it up don't just spread it around," - but that was okay because Mrs. Henderson wasn't actually counting the minutes.

After the kitchen was clean Steve followed Dustin outside and said a silent prayer considering that this might be his last day on earth before tossing the keys to an ecstatic Dustin who practically ran to the driver's seat.